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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRAGUE 000744

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [YI](#) [ZL](#) [EZ](#)
SUBJECT: CZECHS SEE EYE-TO-EYE WITH U.S. ON KOSOVO STATUS
AND SERBIA

REF: PRAGUE 00094

Classified By: Acting DCM Michael Dodman
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[11](#). (C) Summary. Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo and Kosovo Desk Officer Joshua Black visited Prague May 23-24 to meet with Czech government officials to discuss the status of Kosovo. The Czech MFA predicts an independent Kosovo (but acknowledges this outcome may need to be politically imposed on Serbia), and agrees on the need to conclude status talks by the end of the year. They see the need for a long-term international presence to ensure stability in the region (they plan to maintain current Czech troop levels in KFOR), and urge the U.S. to continue its "strong engagement." Assuming future compliance with ICTY, the Czechs continue to support Serbia's candidacy for EU membership and would use their 2009 EU presidency to push for ratification of a Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) for Serbia. End summary.

[12](#). (U) DAS Rosemary DiCarlo and Joshua Black met with MOD Director of Defense Policy Radomir Jahoda, MFA Director General of Europe Jaromir Plisek, MFA Director of Southeast and Eastern Europe Department Tomas Szunyog, MFA Deputy Director of Security Policy Vaclav Balek, and Political Advisor to PM Jiri Paroubek, Ivan Busniak. DiCarlo and Black also met with members of the local press, NGOs (including Simon Panek, Co-founder and Director of Czech NGO People in Need), and think tank representatives. The discussions focused on military issues in the Balkans, the final status of Kosovo, and EU accession for Serbia.

Military Issues

[13](#). (C) On Czech troop commitments in Kosovo, MOD Director of Defense Policy Radomir Jahoda said the Balkans remains a strategic priority for the Czechs, and predicted no material change in Czech policy on the Balkans or Kosovo following the June 2-3 parliamentary elections. The MOD is currently preparing plans for 2007 troop deployment in the region. Jahoda expects the Czechs will maintain current force levels in Kosovo (approximately 600 troops). The Czechs also plan to maintain the 60 troops currently serving with EU forces in Bosnia. In addition, the Czechs will maintain a reserve company in the Czech Republic that can be deployed to Kosovo within 5 days.

[14](#). (C) On NATO, DiCarlo conveyed the U.S. position on maintaining an international military presence, and on increasing the effectiveness of KFOR troops to handle civil

unrest. Jahoda agreed current NATO force levels in Kosovo will need to be maintained for years, and added any troop draw-down should be undertaken carefully and slowly. He said he could imagine EU forces taking over NATO's role in the future.

15. (C) On other military matters, MFA Director General of Europe Jaromir Plisek said the Czechs support Serbia's participation in Partnership for Peace (PFP) as soon as they turn Mladic over to ICTY. Plisek said the Czechs would like to see Bosnia and Serbia join PFP at the same time.

Final Status Talks

16. (C) Plisek said the likely outcome of status talks is an independent Kosovo. (Note: All government officials supported this conclusion, except for Ivan Busniak, Political Advisor to PM Jiri Paroubek, who seemed to support an alternative scenario in which Kosovo would be given full autonomy but remain part of Serbia. Busniak expressed concern that Kosovo would be unable to function independently, and feared Kosovar-Serbs would flee if Kosovo separates from Serbia. His views, however, are neither new nor the official Czech government position, reftel. End note.)

17. (C) Plisek agreed on the need to resolve Kosovo's status this year. He said a negotiated settlement would be optimal, but doubts it can be achieved. MFA Director of Southeast and Eastern Europe Department Tomas Szunyog predicted a settlement will be politically imposed on Serbia. If Kosovo becomes independent, Szunyog offered to provide as models documents used by the Czechs to achieve an amicable

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separation from Slovakia.

18. (C) Szunyog said the Kosovars understand that security and banking system reforms, as well as a long-term international presence, will be part of any settlement. They have not publicly addressed these issues, however, because they are a hard sell to the public. Likewise, the Serbian government does not speak publicly about a possible separation because it is politically unpopular to do so. Szunyog said the USG's "strong engagement" -- in addition to EU involvement and NATO forces -- are needed to enforce the settlement.

Serbian Accession to EU

19. (C) Czech officials across the board strongly support EU membership for Serbia. However, the Czechs supported the EU decision to suspend SAA talks for failure to comply with the ICTY. (Szunyog noted that some countries suffering from enlargement fatigue have used non-compliance as an excuse to slow the accession process.) Assuming talks begin anew, the Czechs believe ratification of an SAA agreement could take two to three years. They therefore anticipate advocating for ratification during their presidency in 2009. They predicted Serbia will not join the EU before 2015, at the earliest. The Czechs do not support the idea of an intermediate step for Serbia; full EU membership should be the goal.

Comment

110. (C) The Balkans are the Czechs' most important security policy priority, a fact unlikely to change in the wake of the June 2-3 Czech general elections. Although not enthusiastic about Kosovo independence and its possible effect on Serbia, the Czechs agree with the U.S. position on Kosovo and Serbia on every material point, and will remain reliable allies within the EU, where they are strong advocates for EU

membership for Serbia and the other countries of the former Yugoslavia. From a military perspective, the Czechs have demonstrated their commitment to stability in the region by deploying more than half of their forces available for worldwide deployment in Kosovo.

¶11. (U) This cable has been cleared by DAS DiCarlo.
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